

VZCZCXYZ0016
PP RUEHWEB

DE RUEHRB #0676/01 1041633
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 141633Z APR 06
FM AMEMBASSY RABAT
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 3401
INFO RUEHAS/AMEMBASSY ALGIERS 3918
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 2895
RUEHNK/AMEMBASSY NOUAKCHOTT 3123
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS 4150
RUEHTU/AMEMBASSY TUNIS 8800
RUEHCL/AMCONSUL CASABLANCA 1569

C O N F I D E N T I A L RABAT 000676

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

STATE FOR NEA/MAG, DRL/PHD

E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/13/2011
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PINR](#) [MO](#)
SUBJECT: IS THERE AN AMAZIGH (BERBER) IDENTITY IN MOROCCO?

REF: A. RABAT 00540

- [1](#)B. RABAT 00567
- [1](#)C. RABAT 00615
- [1](#)D. RABAT 00618
- [1](#)E. RABAT 00635

Classified By: Political Counselor Timothy Lenderking, reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: While the constitution of Morocco recognizes ethnic and religious diversity, it is also clear that citizens are to think of themselves as Moroccan, not as members of separate ethnic or religious groups. Recent Amazigh history in Morocco (reftel A), however, points to the perseverance of a separate identity, steeped in the pride of ancient history as well as the strength of the tribes following independence. Definitions of Amazigh identity and the importance of this identity vary, as might be expected. At the same time, though, a national identity is being fabricated dependent on Amazigh traditions and history, and a political identity is being formed. Tourism is defining the former and the possibility of political reform is encouraging the latter. End Summary.

The Problem of the Blue Scarf

[1](#)2. (SBU) The anti-Atlas reporting trip (reftels A, B, C, E), particularly in the Erfoud area and again in the Agdaz area up to Ouarzazate, raised the issue of Amazigh identity and tourism. (Note: Erfoud is located in the southeastern section of the anti-Atlas; Agdaz is in the southwestern section; and, Ouarzazate is just south of the High Atlas range. End Note.) In the Erfoud area, the majesty of the sand dunes, camel rides emulating the ancient caravans when Sijilmassa, modern Rissani, controlled the area, are all sold to the tourist (reftel B). (Note: Rissani is approximately one-half hour south of Erfoud. End Note.) A moment in history becomes what travelers from primarily Europe and secondarily North America buy. The people selling the moment are blue scarved men who appear to be Tuareg, a more familiar North African "oddity" than just the Amazigh of the anti-Atlas. The tourists are buying "fractured history," as the Tuareg were likely never as far west as Morocco and certainly played no role in the modern nation-state. On the other hand, the Amazigh tribes did and have played a primary role in the history and formation of the present state. (Comment: Over lunch at Al-Akhawayn University, one non-Moroccan faculty member suggested, on the one hand, that

the mixing of Tuareg history and Amazigh history was laughable, but that, on the other hand, it was income generating and consequently understandable, if not acceptable, reftel D. End Comment.)

¶3. (SBU) One of the questions raised is: "Is tourism creating an identity?" By selling blue-scarved Tuaregs, Alaouite history in the Rissani Research Center (reftel B), the restored kasbahs, and souvenirs such as jewelry and knives, tourism is creating an identity for people and provides an illusion of preserving the past. Tourism is, in effect, redefining the group identity. At the same time, tourism is creating a national identity, weaving Alaouite history with Amazigh, albeit with its Tuareg blue scarf, and an appreciation of the desert. The disadvantage is that myths are created which may ultimately negate written and oral history.

The Role of the Associations

¶4. (SBU) While the issues with which the civil society associations in the anti-Atlas are dealing are generally stated to be the same, e.g., economic and social development with Amazigh culture taking second place, the emphasis in each association varies. None of the associations could exist without a "human development" component, yet each of them is eager to preserve aspects of Amazigh culture. Individuals in Erfoud (reftel B) wanted to be viewed as "integrated," likely because of the strict military occupation of the region during Hassan II's reign. Only the two teachers in Erfoud identified themselves as integrated. Most of the men readily identified themselves as Amazigh, or of mixed Arab and Amazigh heritage, and all of the women identified themselves as Amazigh.

¶5. (C) The associations are the visible signs of the tribes today; they seem to have taken over the role tribal councils played in the past. Negotiating with regional authorities, particularly in the case of the anti-Atlas, means not necessarily dealing with those from the largest urban area in a region, rather with the closest town to the association. For example, the representatives from the Al-Nif associations think they must negotiate with the people in Erfoud in order to have services and needs fulfilled in their communities. The Agdaz associations also felt that they should negotiate with Zagora authorities. Political identification as an Amazigh was only important, apparently, to the Boughafer Association members in Al-Nif (reftel C). (Note: Al-Nif is mid-way between Erfoud and Agdaz. End Note.)

Different Views

¶6. (C) Poloff met with Abdelwahad Driouche (reftel A) April 6 to discuss identity issues specifically. Driouche's identity as an Amazigh is paramount for him. He, like many other Amazighs, identifies himself as an Amazigh first and a Moroccan second. Until recently, Driouche was a member of the Popular Movement (MP) political party, which merged with another Berber party, the National Popular Movement (MNP) and the Democratic Union (UD) March 24 to form the Popular Movement Union (UPM). The MP, originally formed in the 1950s, represented Amazighs. Driouche, at a party meeting in March, presented the idea that the old leadership needed to step down. He was asked to leave the party for making such a suggestion by Mahjubi Aherdane, the party leader. Driouche thinks political parties have been usurped for corrupt reasons and cannot represent Amazigh or any other constituency adequately. When Poloff questioned Driouche about the new political party law and how it might impact Amazigh political parties, i.e., that these might have to be dissolved, he said that political parties will always represent ethnic or other groups.

¶7. (C) Driouche was hesitant about discussing religiously

aligned parties. This hesitancy arose because of his attendance at an Amazigh conference in Meknes the week of March 26. (Note: The conference declaration will be public. Post will report when it is published. End Note.) Amazigh from throughout the country attended, including representatives of one group from the anti-Atlas who stated publicly that they wished to reclaim their Jewish heritage and to say they are Jews. Driouche explained that these Amazigh, along with the other attendees, were not concerned with denigrating Islam, i.e., one could be an Amazigh and Muslim, but that being Muslim did not demand giving up an Amazigh identity.

¶8. (C) For Driouche, there must be changes in the constitution; he predicted a new constitution within the next four to five months. The changes Driouche thinks will occur are: the Amazigh language will be recognized; there will be a system of federated (autonomous) states, enabling the Amazigh population to express itself; and, the Amazigh through the federated states system, will have the role in the GOM which they should have.

Comment

¶9. (C) If the indicators of being an Amazigh are the traditionally accepted anthropological definitions, e.g., language and self-identification through cultural attributes such as poetry, music, dance and celebrations, then the individuals and associations (reftels A, B, C, E) in the anti-Atlas are Amazigh. It may well be that people in the anti-Atlas were unwilling to discuss political actions or affiliations, excluding the president of the Erfoud area commune (reftel B), if they were not of mixed Arab-Amazigh heritage, or because they wanted Missionoffs to have a positive impression and, by extension, assist them. At the same time, though, the continuance of the fear felt during the reign of Hassan II may account for hesitancy to discuss political actions or plans. Driouche said that 95 percent of the cases which the Equity and Reconciliation Commission (IER) reviewed were from members of Amazigh communities.

¶10. (C) In Rabat and Casablanca, the political, economic and commercial urban centers, elite members of society over the age of thirty consistently say they were not raised to think of being Amazigh or not -- they were raised to think of themselves as Moroccan. Even those who say they are "part Amazigh" do not identify with those like Driouche and the participants in the Meknes conference.

¶11. (C) Language cannot be the major internal identification marker. Too many Amazigh have said that there needs to be an Amazigh "classical" language, i.e., a "fuhsa" for Amazigh. While the Tamaynout organization (reftel A) is attempting to fashion one, it does not seem to be accepted. Members of the older generation readily admit that individual dialects of Amazigh are not comprehensible to others, making French or Arabic an easier universal language. People are well-aware of the fact that to function in Moroccan society they must be at least tri-lingual -- Arabic, French, and Amazigh -- and, increasingly, the importance of English is being underscored. If language is not the primary ethnic marker, then neither can celebrations, music and dance be. Identity must extend beyond the intangible cultural/ethnic markers and include history, e.g., as with the Boughafer Association (reftel C), and a recognized presence within the fabric of the modern society. For some, like Driouche, it is a federated Morocco which identifies the past and present significance of the Amazigh within the country. It remains to be seen, however, how much power the Amazigh who desire a federated state have to influence constitutional change in the country.

Visit Embassy Rabat's Classified Website;
<http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/nea/rabat>

Riley